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## SHALL CHINA ENTER THE WAR?<sup>1</sup>

*By Gilbert Reid, D.D., Director-in-Chief of the International  
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### A MEMORANDUM PRESENTED TO THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IN FEBRUARY

To this question which I place at the head of this discussion I reply with full force of conviction, after over thirty years of hard work in China's behalf: "A thousand times No."

China has in the past escaped many threatening dangers, sometimes from within, sometimes from without. The escape has generally come through a few Chinese in high places of authority remaining cool and level-headed. Where dangers have not been averted, as in the Boxer year, it has been because the number of such men has been insufficient; the few sensible and patriotic ones have often offered up their lives as martyrs.

The present danger, the new form of temptation, is so different from anything known in the past, that it will be easy for the Chinese who are now in high places of authority to be beguiled, or, to use an Americanism, to be "gulled."

There is nothing new in the mere attempt to persuade China to join the Entente Allies against the two Central Powers represented diplomatically in Peking. It has been conjectured that the proposals were also aimed against Japan. Both President Yuan and President Li in these previous attempts had enough sense to reject the proposals and enough patriotism and unselfishness to spurn the enticements accompanying the proposals.

The attempt today, with the same object in view, comes to us in another form, with a far more innocent air, and

<sup>1</sup> This article was written before the United States declared war against Germany.—EDITORS.

with a greater capacity to inspire confidence, than all the previous futile attempts.

The American government, at least the diplomatic part of the government, is now taking the lead in enticing China to imitate the noble example of a sister republic and a former neutral—a neutral whose neutrality has been of the first magnitude. I do not say that China is now urged to join the Entente, particularly England and France, but that she is most affectionately and respectfully recommended to join with the United States against Germany and Austria-Hungary. Properly, the exhortation to practise the old and easy art of imitation can only mean that China, out of mere desire to imitate, and with no other possible reason, shall also break off diplomatic relations with Germany. I do not know whether China has been counselled, as by a friend, to do more. President Wilson in making the break with Germany made the declaration, according to Reuter, “that he took it for granted that all neutrals would follow the example of the United States in severing diplomatic relations with Germany.” We have a right to suppose that only this request, which in appearance is most innocent, has been made known to the Chinese Government, and nothing more.

There is a danger of taking *exaggerated* views concerning this request of the American President as concerning every thing else connected with this last lamentable clash.

Three proposals for action by the Chinese government in relation to Germany are being widely discussed. The one is to break off diplomatic relations with Germany; the second is to send a protest to Germany for her “new measures of submarine warfare;” and the third is to join the Entente in war against Germany. These three propositions are quite distinct, but in the minds of many they are getting sadly mixed. Even so keen a mind as Putnam Weale, who now longs to place “a garland round the Republic,” says concerning China’s protest to Germany:

In taking this first step China has opened a new and important chapter in her foreign relations; for although the maximum so far contemplated by her is simply rupture of diplomatic relations

with Germany, it is quite certain that she will not hesitate to follow wherever America may lead; and that the United States will be involved in open warfare almost immediately is certain.

This settles the matter so far as China and the United States are concerned, if Putnam Weale, a Britisher, has any chance of settling the matter. China's action of protesting is taken to be the same as the United States' action of severing diplomatic relations; and the American action is taken to be the same as entering upon open warfare. If all advice to China is thus muddled, China will find it hard to walk in the straight and narrow way of neutrality, justice and good-will.

Personally, as one concentrating attention on China's interests alone, I give no support to either of the three proposals, as bearing on China's international obligations.

The first proposal, that made by the United States government to China, that she, too, sever diplomatic relations with Germany, ought to be rejected.

I am looking at the effects on China, while President Wilson was thinking only of American interests. Whether he was right, fair and prudent in the position taken, I do not here discuss; a few weeks will show whether all Americans agree with President Wilson. Already we learn that ex-Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, does not agree with the President, though both are of the Democratic party.

Even supposing that President Wilson's move is wiser than what Solomon ever made or longed for, the inference does not follow that the Chinese republic, away out here on the Asiatic continent, would be equally wise in rushing into making the same move. Let Americans all by themselves derive all the blessings that are possible from this great transaction, but let China strive for no prize till duty alone calls her to it.

China can well wait till all the neutral governments in Europe, and then all in Central and South America, imitate the United States in breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany, before she makes the same big jump. Thus far the neutral nations showed themselves more ready to sup-

port President Wilson in his plea for peace than they are now doing in his action that borders on war. China at that time did not go as far as America went or as she, a neutral nation, ought to have done. In any thing approaching the countenance of war with all its calamities, China may well find it her *duty* to do less, very much less, than the United States.

When President Wilson became a leader in the cause of peace, it was fitting for China and all neutrals to follow suit. When he, the head of a neutral nation, tries to place the full power of the American people to the side of war, though professing a passion for ultimate peace, and against one side in the great conflict, without being against the other side, in equally good reason, I sincerely hope that the last effort will come to naught, and the former effort, through other hands, be blessed of Heaven. Still more I hope that China will cleave fast to ways of peace and eschew war, unless and until China's own rights are trampled upon by whomsoever the offender.

Thus far no other neutral nation has adopted this plan of dealing with Germany; this is good reason for China to go a little slow. And yet the *Peking Gazette* in magnifying China's act speaks of her "entry into Welt-politik," and of "China associating herself with the United States"—as all "a victory of the younger intellectual forces." China is not in line with the United States, until she, too, severs connections with Germany. When China breaks off friendly relations with one group of Belligerents, she at the same time makes an entry into the Entente, but not into "welt-politik."

For an ambassador or minister to be given his passport with the request to leave for home, is not an unknown occurrence in international law. This happens in case of improper conduct on the part of the diplomat. A rare occurrence, and a more serious affair is that of severing all relations with another government. This is a break in friendship, a cessation of cordiality; it is very close to actual hostilities. Unless the reasons for so acting are very strong—unless there is no alternative—the action by every possible means should be avoided.

The American President declared the cessation of friendly relations with Germany, not *after* any American interests or rights had been injured, but only on the receipt of a warning from Germany. China's interests and rights are not being injured by German blockade of Britain, France and Italy, not injured as through the high-handedness of certain other countries—why, then, should she break off diplomatic relations with Germany and possibly with Austria-Hungary?

This break with Germany on the part of the United States can by an effort rest on usages established by international law, but China in making the same kind of a break could find a precedent nowhere in the treatises on international law, not even those which have been put forth by American experts. A prodigy would be needed to concoct a reason from the new German blockade why the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs should hand passport to the German minister and request him to leave for his own or the nearest friendly country. What may prove reasonable for the United States would be senseless for China. What has she to do with German blockade or German submarine warfare?

Furthermore, though the blockade by England through use of mines was prior to the German declaration of blockade and was meant to be detrimental to all neutrals trying to reach Germany, and though the blockade was also a blockade of Denmark and Holland, the United States has made no protest or broken off relations with England. China would be fair and sensible if she paid no attention to either blockade and remained fair to all.

For China to break off relations with Germany would be an unfriendly act. It would also be an unfair act, unless she broke off relations with England also, who first declared a blockade to the total subversion of neutral rights.

If China were a strong nation, she need not worry about one less or one more national friend. Being weak, she should aim to keep the friendship of all, and not commit an hostile act, sure to be paid back by an irrevocable law at some future time.

For two years and more Germany has given China less trouble than England or France or Japan; why, then, turn on her as on an enemy? It is no light thing for China, away out here on the edge of Asia, to sever all connections with Germany over a life-and-death struggle taking place in Europe, particularly between Germany and England.

The second plan, that of entering a protest, has already been followed by the Chinese government, but we are afraid, without due consideration of its serious import.

Submarine warfare, North Sea blockades, war zones, and all such things, are part of the horrible war. For the moment England and Germany are the chief contestants—a contest as to which one can first starve out the other. All other nations, especially if they profess neutrality; should keep at a respectable distance. If China wants to do any “exhorting,” she should first exhort her men citizens not to go as so many coolies to France or England while war is on, and, secondly, if they must go, to keep away from all war zones on land and sea.

To say the least, it looks rather laughable for China to send a warning, an admonition, and instruction, to Germany, as to the way she should carry on war. If the ruthlessness is the ground of advice, then the advice should be given to England as well as to Germany, for the purpose of both is the same, namely, *to starve the enemy*. There is less intention by Germany than by England to injure neutrals. England allows no entry to Germany; while Germany clearly defines a safe passage to an English port.

If China, as her note declares, is going to sever relations with Germany, in addition to a rather strong protest, “to further the cause of the world’s peace” and for the “maintenance of the sanctity of international law,” she is adopting a most inconsistent procedure, and one that is lop-sided. To be fair, China must do the same with England, for her violations of international law are as “sand which is upon the seashore for multitude.”

Seeing that China has already sent in her protest, thus imitating other neutral countries, who are closely affected, let her stop there, and go no further, lest a worse and more incongruous blunder be thereby committed.

Back of all this distracting discussion there lies in the Chinese mind something more serious, far-reaching and apparently more far-sighted than the simple matter of breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany. The idea is that China join the Entente, particularly England and France, with whom the United States is now supposed to be a new partner.

This is the third plan against which China ought to be solemnly and earnestly warned.

The hint is thrown out, as in former attempts, that *China can thus offset and resist the encroachments of Japan*. Here is a fascinating, advantageous, and hence sensible alliance for China to seize, ere the chance be let slip. An alliance of England, France and the United States has already been talked about as best guarantee of future peace. For China to be requested to join this group, how honoring, how promising, how complimentary!

Personally I do not believe that future peace can come through the rivalries of alliances. Even Mr. Asquith has expressed himself against this grouping of nations. Neither do I believe in "entangling alliances" for my own country, whatever may be advocated by President Wilson in contradistinction to the sage advice of President Washington. Beyond all this I do not believe in aid of this political scheming for China. I see no reason for abandoning the old theory of the "open door," even should any number of foreign powers plan its overthrow, as has been tried before. To eject all Germans and Austrians from China, from this time forth forever more, may be desirable for British and French and pro-Ally Americans, but its consummation will mean that China, too, under foreign tutelage is taught to break treaties, while the whole lot of them will go back on every high principle and holy aim they have ever professed. I am ashamed that any of my countrymen have done even a little to lead China away from the straight path of righteousness and fair-dealing. Let China be not deceived. She will reap no harvest of national security, if she takes from another and plants in the good old soil the seed of injustice.



Even as a matter of prudence China should be warned. This grouping process, the cause of the present war, will, as sure as fate, stir up a rival group. All the nations are not forever going to follow at the beck and call of England. One alliance will lead to another alliance. China, in taking sides, will be too weak to prevent being crushed in the world's great pinchers.

The Chinese and their foreign friends have heretofore regretted that the war has been brought into China. Now it is proposed that China enter the war.

When England and Japan attacked Tsingtao and ignored China's neutrality by marching troops across Chinese territory, in the face of protest, then reason could have been found for going to war with these two interlopers.

When Japan forced on China twenty-four demands, accompanied by an ultimatum, then was the time, if ever, for China to go to war.

When France in her usual high-handedness, that is, usual for China, encroached on Chinese territory in Tientsin, and would not yield to China's just arguments, then was the time, if ever, for China to go to war.

For China, after all this mild acquiescence to Entente Powers, or what Mr. Eugene Chen of the *Peking Gazette* might call "spineless diplomacy," to now join these same Entente Powers and declare war against Germany for measures of warfare around British and French shores—measures no better and no worse than those of England—would show a form of diplomacy not exactly "spineless" but, worse than that, deranged. The plaudits of Entente advisers, with a gentle refrain from my own country, may rush China into war, but, if so, there will be only one more folly to be added to various follies of past years, leading China more and more into the meshes.

This war is like a vast conflagration. Instead of rushing into the fire and adding fuel to the flames, it would be better for China, and, to my way of thinking, for America, too, to stay on the outside and do every thing in human power to check the raging flames and rescue lives from the midst of the "burning fiery furnace."

My own advice, then, is that China reject all three proposals for getting entangled; that she maintain her neutral spirit—far more neutral than most Americans have been; and that she treat all nations with the same spirit of fairness, cultivating cordial relations with all, and presenting to all the same opportunities for trade, enlightenment, and respectful diplomatic relationship. This advice of mine may be rejected, as other advice I was wont to give in days of Manchu rule, but in giving it, I do it in all sincerity, looking solely for China's good.